



TROJAN TODAY

YOUR SCHOOL TOWN OF HIGHLAND SOURCE FOR NEWS AND EVENTS | JUNE-JULY 2019

TRANSITION FIRST GRADE

Five years after establishing a successful transitional kindergarten program, the district is launching its first Transitional First Grade at Johnston Elementary in August.

"This is a bona fide first grade classroom that will have a cap of 20 students who are sitting right on the fence between being ready for first grade and being retained," Johnston Elementary Principal Ryan Erdelac said. "Their skill sets are such that they need a bit more of a boost to be successful and this setting provides just that."

The hope is that the gift of time and specialized energies devoted to students most in need will prepare them to move on to second grade.

Students who would benefit most from transitional first grade have already been identified. Students in the program will receive door-to-door bus service to Johnston. ♦

The program

Implementing a transitional first grade in Highland was the brainchild of longtime teacher Kristi Kijurna, who helped launch transitional kindergarten.

The idea is to give every child the extra attention they need to be successful in that critical first-grade year.

By April 2020, Kijurna and her paraprofessional staff will know whether a child is able to proceed to second grade or goes back to their district school to repeat first grade in a new environment.



New principal joins Merkle

Even before he officially begins work as Merkle Elementary principal July 1, Eric McMahon has been wowed by his welcome to Highland.

On the night the School Board approved his hire, McMahon – most recently principal at Gary's Beveridge Elementary – turned around to find a throng of his new Merkle family waiting to welcome him.

"It was absolutely amazing," said McMahon, who will be filing the shoes of retiring Principal Rose Alexander. "Their show of support for me says a lot about what has already been built at this school."

"As assistant principal, McMahon helped elevate West Side Leadership Academy's school grade from an F to a B in a few short years."

Superintendent Brian Smith said McMahon quickly rose to the top of the board's choices to lead Merkle.

"What we found in Eric is an energy and passion to do what's right for children and a string of successes to show for his efforts," Smith said. "He is a collaborator dedicated to building a strong, effective team and we are eager to see him in action." ♦

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SCHOOL BOARD

Patrick Krull, President

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Robert Kuva, Secretary

Victor A. Garcia, Member

Carol Green Fraley, Member

The school board meets the third Tuesday of the month at 6 p.m. in the Administration Building, 9145 Kennedy Avenue, Highland.

INFO: Visit hhs.highland.k12.in.us for the latest information, including meeting agendas, school policies, board mission, beliefs and values.



ARBOR DAY CELEBRATION: Beautiful weather and a great cause made for an extra-special Arbor Day at Warren Elementary. Students helped plant a dogwood tree donated by NIPSCO and were given Douglas fir seedlings to plant at home, also compliments of NIPSCO. Warren Elementary Principal Christina Davis said her students were excited to participate. "Our students had the opportunity to hear from people who really care about the environment. They learned just how important trees are to the community and our quality of life."

LETTER FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

***"What an outstanding academic year of achievements!
Thank you students, teachers, staff for all your hard work"***



A huge thank you to students and staff for a year well done. We've learned and played, embarked on initiatives like elementary Project Lead the Way and distance learning. We set the bar high and reached higher.

NATIONAL JUNIOR HONOR SOCIETY

Congratulations to the 38 students who have become the first inductees in the Highland Middle School Chapter of the National Junior Honor Society. This group of standouts embodies what it means to be a great student and exemplary member of the community. To be considered for membership, students must display excellence in scholarship, service, leadership, character and citizenship.

TOP 40 PERCENT

Big news: US News and World Report has named Highland High School among the top 40 percent of all high schools in the nation for 2019. The rankings are based on college readiness, math and reading proficiency and performance, underserved student performance, college curriculum breadth and graduation rate. Here are some numbers that should make us all proud:

- ✓ HHS ranks 115 out of 336 in the state
- ✓ 43 percent of students take AP classes
- ✓ 58 percent are proficient in reading
- ✓ 94 percent graduate

Kudos to Principal Dr. Patrick Weil and his team. Keep up the great work!

Brian Smith
Superintendent
School Town of Highland



AT SOUTHRIDGE ...

When Southridge Elementary opted into its third One School One Book reading adventure, they chose "The One and Only Ivan," a story written from the vantage point of a silverback gorilla, who lives not-so-happily at a mall in Washington.

As students embraced the very human emotions page after page, teachers, parents and staff went all in — immersing the school in all things gorilla, beginning with a life-sized Ivan.

Penny pitches, the sale of banana pencils and bookmarks, along with recycling out-of-use cellphones helped each grade adopt a gorilla of their own from Brookfield Zoo in Chicago.

"This book was based on a true story of a gorilla and how he evolves when making friends with a young elephant," Principal Roy Hufford said. "Sometimes, it was a hard story to read but had a good message that resonated with our kids." ❖

THE NAME GAME

It was the combined efforts of parents, teachers and students that made it possible to personalize the story. As part of the integrative experience, each grade adopted Binti Jua and her family of western lowland gorillas who live at Brookfield Zoo. Family members include:

- Kindergarten: Ali
- First Grade: Zachary
- Second Grade: Nora
- Third Grade: Koola
- Fourth Grade: Kamba
- Fifth Grade: JoJo
- Special Ed: Binti Jua

PLTW program building skills, camaraderie among students

One academic year after launching the problem-based curriculum known as Project Lead the Way at all four elementary schools, school leaders are calling it a huge success.

Southridge Principal Roy Hufford said he has seen strides at every grade level — in student engagement, camaraderie, team building, problem solving and more.

"We are seeing our high-ability students who excel at everything in a traditional academic setting are being challenged," Hufford said. "We are also watching our children, who struggle in a traditional classroom, excel as valued members of the team."

Every module is geared by age. Team problem-solving challenges include:

- ✓ Building and coding a robot to get through an obstacle course.
- ✓ Building compound machines that pull lions out of their enclosures.

Students can even figure out how to get out of an escape room using clues that open a series of locks.

"This curriculum is building camaraderie among the kids. Through their commonalities, they are building success," Hufford said. "Project Lead the Way is breaking down barriers and building skills that are helping our kids in ways that will position them for lifelong success." ❖

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Project Lead the Way taps into students' exploratory nature, engages them in learning that feels like play and encourages them to keep discovering — now and for years to come. Whether designing a car-safety belt or building digital animations, students engage in critical and creative thinking, build teamwork skills and learn to try and try again when faced with challenges.



Falling for fishing club ...

HOOK, LINE & SINKER

When Dan Cochrane cast a net looking for Johnston Elementary students eager to join the new Fishing Club, he wasn't certain if there would be two or 20.

As it turned out, student interest exceeded the amount of gear the second grade teacher was able to secure from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

During Monday meetings, the former Dunes Learning Center intern along with his helpers – Title 1 Instructor Bonnie Lula and Kindergarten paraprofessional Cole Linkiewicz – taught students about the anatomy of fish, how to string a pole and bait a hook. Those sessions evolved into hands-on learning and catch-and-release trips to Meadows Pond.

"It was so cool to see the kids faces light up. They would yell in delight every time they caught a fish," he said. "They were doing something totally different than what they were used to. During two sessions, our kids caught 75 fish." ♦

INFO: Johnston students interested in joining the club, should email Second Grade Teacher Dan Cochrane at dcochrane@highland.k12.in.us.



7 ways to keep your brain sharp over summer

When parents ask Highland's Asst. Superintendent Dr. Sherri Mitchell for suggestions to help their children keep up academically during the summer, her quick reply: Your imagination and the sky is the limit.

"There are literally thousands of great programs that are fun – and help children use the skills they have and learn some new ones."

VISIT THE LIBRARY

From sewing classes to Lego nights for parents and children, Mitchell said the Highland library is a treasure trove for all ages. Visit lcplin.org/highland-3079 for details.

LOOK TO THE OUTDOORS

Whether its flower petals, stones or sticks – add, subtract, multiply and divide by combining math and the great outdoors. Add complexity for older children to keep it challenging.

COUNT YOUR STEPS

Taking a long, leisurely walk? Try taking one route one day and another the next to get to the same place. Count your steps and discuss why shorter isn't always better.

MAKE A SCAVENGER HUNT

A trip to Indiana Dunes National Park is a botany bonanza. Use the park website – nps.gov/indu – before you go to make a scavenger hunt list, checking off the items you find.

MAKE A VIDEO

After finishing a book, videotape your child telling what made it special. When you're done, send it off for the grandparents to enjoy.

PACK A PICNIC

Find a place you enjoy, pack a picnic and a blanket and head to one of Highland's great parks. Now, lean back, watch the clouds change shapes and let your child's imagination run wild.

WRITE A STORY

Write and illustrate a story about your summer adventures because when it come to kids and summer every day can be an adventure.